

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 24, 2007

COMPTON CREEK ENHANCEMENT FEASIBILITY REPORT

File No. 06-110

Project Manager: David Hayes

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed \$125,000 to the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council to complete data collection, engineering, cost and feasibility analysis of habitat enhancement and trail access projects along a section of Compton Creek in Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County and part of the City of Compton.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access and Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Watershed Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project area and Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Letters of Support](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111, 31251-31270 and 31400-09 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$125,000) to the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council (Council) to complete data collection, engineering, cost and feasibility analysis of habitat enhancement and trail access projects along a section of Compton Creek.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes set forth in Chapters 6 and 9 of Division 21 of the California Public Code (Sections 31251-70 and 31400-09) and with the authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Section 31111 to award grants to non-profit organizations for these purposes.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Compton Creek watershed drains an area of approximately 42 square miles and is a major tributary of the Los Angeles River. (Exhibit 2 & 3) This project would provide a grant to the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council (Council) to conduct data collection, preliminary engineering, cost and feasibility analysis for implementation of creek enhancement and trail access improvement projects along Compton Creek in Los Angeles County. The Council will produce the Compton Creek Enhancement Feasibility Report.

The project will focus on the 2.8-mile reach of Compton Creek channel, which was identified in the Compton Creek Watershed Plan as a priority area for enhancement activities (Exhibit 3). The project will collect information needed to prepare and evaluate up to four conceptual detailed design scenarios for enhancement and public access improvements along the creek. In addition, the project will complete preliminary engineering work, flood management analysis, and development of cost estimates. Annual avian inventories by the Audubon Society have been conducted along this reach of the Compton Creek for the past several years, but there is an absence of habitat analysis in relation to potential enhancement projects for this area. All scenarios will meet Los Angeles County’s updated flood protection requirements and be reviewed by stakeholders for comments.

This project will build on completed planning documents, including the Compton Creek Watershed Plan and the Compton Creek Regional Garden Park Master Plan and implement a key priority outlined in the recently completed Compton Creek Watershed Implementation Strategy, funded by the Conservancy. The Watershed Plan established goals and objectives for improving the watershed, and this project will address five of those objectives: 1) improve wetland and riparian habitat in the natural bottom part of Compton Creek; 2) create a functional wetland and riparian habitat where feasible; 3) demonstrate maintenance of flood protection levels as a condition for channel modifications; 4) develop pedestrian and bicycle trails along Compton Creek that link with existing regional trails and 5) demonstrate water quality Best Management Practices from the Compton Creek Watershed Plan to improved urban runoff. The proposed report will include parts of the earthen-channel within Compton, but focus on the 2.8 miles within Los Angeles County.

The Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council is a 501 (c) (3) organization that is working cooperatively to solve problems in the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed. The Council's mission is to facilitate preservation and restoration of the watershed through education, research, and planning. The Council has led the work to complete the Compton Creek Watershed Plan and the Compton Creek Watershed Implementation Strategy documents. It has conducted extensive outreach throughout the watershed, including hosting the Compton Creek Steering Committee. The long-term commitments and past success in the Compton Watershed make the Council a highly qualified organization to lead this project.

This project will include and benefit many interested stakeholders working on the enhancement of Compton Creek, including: the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, Los Angeles County, City of Compton, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Heal the Bay, Trust for Public Land, Los Angeles Conservation Corps and several other community-based organizations.

Site Description: The Compton Creek Watershed located in the southern part of the Los Angeles Basin and is home to approximately 700,000 people. Compton Creek itself drains an area of approximately 42 square miles and flows generally south through a 5.8-mile channel. Compton Creek is a trapezoidal flood control channel; much of the creek has concrete bottom and sides. Compton Creek is a major tributary of the Los Angeles River (Exhibit 2).

Just north of the 91 freeway in the City of Compton, the channel widens and has a natural, earthen bottom with armored trapezoidal sides. The project area is this reach, which extends nearly 2.8 miles to just above the confluence of the Los Angeles River. The Compton Creek earthen-bottom reach is in an area with a high water-table, and although channelized, the creek supports surprisingly dense riparian vegetation in this area (Exhibit 3). The creek supports some native plants, but is predominately invasive and nonnative plants. There are some existing bike trails on the top of the channel sides along parts of Los Angeles County in this project area but the trails are discontinuous. There are several opportunities to improve access throughout the project area. The project area is partly within the City of Compton, while the majority of the area is located in unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.

Project History: In 2000, the Conservancy was asked to help form the Compton Creek Task Force and to serve on the Steering Committee for the Compton Watershed Plan. Since then, the Conservancy has provided grant funding for the completion of the Compton Creek Watershed Plan and the Compton Creek Watershed Implementation Strategy, as well as for training and preliminary project development activities with several community-based organizations. This project will build on and compliment previous work by developing detailed plans for enhancement of the earthen-bottomed portion of the creek, which has the highest potential for environmental enhancement or restoration.

The Compton Creek Watershed Plan Implementation Strategy, authorized by the Conservancy in 2005, has as one of its Compton watershed short-term actions: seek funding to conduct studies to improve [riparian] wetland habitat in the earthen bottom of Compton Creek" and "connect Compton Creek bike paths with south Compton Creek bike paths." The Compton Creek Enhancement Feasibility Report will implement that key short-term action identified in Compton Creek Watershed Plan Implementation Strategy.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$125,000
Los Angeles County (in-kind services)	<u>70,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$195,000

The intended source of funds for the Conservancy's contribution to this project is the FY 03/04 appropriation from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water Coastal Beach Protection Fund of 2002 (Proposition 50) which allocated funds to the Conservancy for "the purpose of protecting coastal watersheds, including, but not limited to,...associated planning, permitting, and administrative costs" (codified at Water Code § 79570), consistent with our enabling legislation. The proposed project involves critical planning work necessary to identify specific projects and strategies that will protect and restore coastal watershed resources.

The proposition further specifies that ten percent of the Conservancy funds are allocated for "the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water and wildlife resources." (*Id.* Section 79571).

The proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to protect and restore the aquatic and riparian habitats of Compton Creek and develop a trail network for public access that is compatible with the habitat goals. In addition, the proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation, as discussed in the "Consistency with Conservancy's enabling legislation" section below, and with applicable local and regional watershed management plans as discussed in the "Consistency with Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan" section of this report. The proposed authorization is thus consistent with the funding requirements of Proposition 50.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Department, Watershed Management Division will provide \$70,000 of in-kind-services in the form of engineering design review services and hydrology analysis.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-70) provides for the Conservancy's participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. The proposed authorization would facilitate the enhancement of wetland and riparian resources in the Compton Creek watershed, which will provide beneficial effects in the lower Los Angeles River and harbor area. Section 31251 of the Public Resources Code authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values. The proposed projects will enhance coastal resources by finalizing a select number of projects that protect riparian corridors, and minimize erosion and sedimentation.

Section 31251.2 authorizes Conservancy participation in projects to enhance a watershed resource that lies partly outside the coastal zone, where such action protects or enhances coastal resources within the coastal zone. Loss of habitat is a primary issue throughout the watershed as a result of channelization of the river and urbanization of the watershed. The Compton Creek Watershed is a sub-watershed of the Los Angeles River watershed, which lies partly within and partly outside the coastal zone. The proposed authorization would address habitat restoration, trail links and urban runoff water quality issues that would improve water quality in the lower Los Angeles River and San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor areas.

Chapter 9 of Division 21 (Public Resources Code 31400-31409) establishes the Conservancy's role in implementing a system of public accessways to the State's coastline. Through the proposed authorization, the Conservancy would play a role in providing an important public access opportunity for inland communities, to connect with regional trails that provide access to coastal resources.

Pursuant to Section 31400.3, the Coastal Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations such as the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council to assist with establishing a system of public accessways. The feasibility study will evaluate several potential alternative trail alignments to link the proposed Compton Creek Trail with the regional Lario Trail, on the east levee of the Los Angeles River. Funding this accessway project is consistent with these provisions as well as with Section 31400.1 which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to non-profit entities for purposes of developing lands suitable for public accessways to and along the coast, when the subject accessways serve greater than local needs. The proposed project will provide engineering and cost analysis for trail alignments to link with existing regional trails systems connecting to coastal areas.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy has been determined by the total amount of available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority.

The proposed project is consistent with the Local Coastal Programs of the County of Los Angeles as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below

Finally, the Conservancy is authorized under Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code to fund and undertake plans and feasibility studies, and to award grants to nonprofit organizations, in order to implement Division 21. The proposed grant to Council would assist the nonprofit organization and its collaborators as they analyze the soft-bottomed areas of Compton Creek so that enhancement projects can be implemented.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective A**, of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the project will design plans for increasing resource enhancement, including stream and habitat corridors and promoting public recreation.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, the proposed authorizations will lead to the development of projects that will improve water quality that will benefit the Compton Creek Watershed and the Los Angeles River and Los Angeles Harbor/San Pedro Bay areas.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located in the Compton Creek Watershed and situated in the southern most part of the Los Angeles Basin. Compton Creek itself is a major tributary of the Los Angeles River. The Los Angeles River drains into the Los Angeles - Long Beach Harbor areas affecting water quality and beach conditions in the City of Long Beach.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, this analysis would not occur. Conservancy funding will provide essential analysis, data and cost estimates that will be the foundation for designing feasible habitat enhancement and recreation project priorities in this part of the Compton Watershed.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project will focus on the existing watershed riparian resources for enhancement and trail opportunities that will connect public access and recreation to regional and coastal trails. When completed, the project will provide regional and local planners and stakeholders a blueprint for trail alignment opportunities for links through and from this watershed to other regional recreational facilities. The feasibility report will be the basis for planning development and implementation strategies for habitat corridor projects in the watershed.

Additional Criteria

7. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The Compton Creek Habitat Enhancement Feasibility Report will address creek habitat enhancement, hydrology, creek channel engineering, recreational opportunities, and public safety issues for project development opportunities and constraints.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Conflict resolution:** The proposed project will address the conflicts between flood control capacity constraints, habitat enhancement, public access, and urban runoff water quality.
10. **Readiness:** If approved, the Watershed Council will start work immediately. Consultants will be hired to complete the biological inventory in the spring season and the feasibility report will be completed in approximately nine months.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/
STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

As discussed in the Project Summary, the proposed project is consistent with and helps achieve objectives in the Compton Creek Watershed Management Plan and Compton Creek Watershed Plan Implementation Strategy.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL ACT:

The proposed project is consistent with the planning and management policies of the Coastal Act (Division 20, Public Resources Code, Sections 30000 *et seq.*). Public Resources Code Section 30231 states, “The biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes . . . shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored. . . .” This project is intended to lead to habitat enhancement for the Compton Creek, which drains to coastal waters through the Los Angeles River.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 because it involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions and will not have a legally binding effect on later activities. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.